

Pair Plead Guilty To Vehicle Break-In And Identity-Theft Scheme In Benton

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BENTON - An Oblong man and Robinson woman pleaded guilty on Thursday, August 4, 2022, to breaking into cars, stealing checks and IDs from vehicles, and committing identity theft in order to obtain thousands of dollars from local banks by fraud.

According to court documents, Zachary Patrick, 30, of Oblong, Illinois, and Briana Blair, 31, of Robinson, Illinois, stole checks and personal identifying information from a series of victims, often by breaking into the victims' vehicles.

Patrick and Blair then used the victims' information however they could, writing and depositing fraudulent checks, forging victims' signatures, and withdrawing and spending thousands of dollars as they traveled around eastern Illinois and western Indiana. The pair even opened a bank account using one victim's stolen information. The pair was eventually caught in a hotel parking lot in Brazil, Indiana, breaking into yet another vehicle. Patrick and Blair initially identified themselves to law enforcement using two of the identities they had stolen, but eventually admitted to their true identities. Law enforcement recovered a pile of stolen IDs, credit cards, and financial information after their arrest.

Both Patrick and Blair pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit financial institution fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. They are scheduled to be sentenced on November 17, 2022, and face a mandatory minimum of two years in prison and a statutory maximum of as many as 32 years in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. "All who have been victimized by identity theft and its related crimes understand just how serious and far-reaching its consequences can be," said United States Attorney Rachelle Aud Crowe.

"Along with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners, this office will continue to make investigating and prosecuting these offenses a top priority. I thank the Federal Bureau of Investigation-Springfield Field Office, the Oblong Police Department, the Clay County Sheriff's Office, and the other local law enforcement agencies involved for their work in investigating this case." Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter T. Reed is prosecuting the case.